

Southwest Scene

Santa Fe has year-round opportunities for savoring art, culture, history, relaxation, food and more—all in a beautiful desert setting. BY BETHANY KANDEL

IMAGINE THIS: CRISP mountain air seasoned with the aromatic scent of burning piñon logs; colorful chile pepper wreaths hanging from doorways on baked brown adobe; twinkling light-draped trees decorating a central plaza, all under a dusting of snow slowly melting in the bright azure sky. It's picture-perfect Santa Fe in winter.

Although many people think of it as a warm-weather destination, this Southwestern city doesn't hibernate in the cold. In fact, though Santa Fe has something to offer in every season, there's a special sparkle and coziness during the holidays.

More than 400 years old, Santa Fe is the nation's oldest capital and, in the 1800s, was one of the most significant trading cities of the American West. Nestled in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, "The City Different" continues to meld the Wild West, and Hispanic and Native American cultures with its thriving arts scene, award-winning restaurants, and historic sights and museums. And like Florida, the sun shines year-round, with more than 300 sunny days annually.

Start your day at the local favorite, Tia Sophia's diner, with a hearty breakfast burrito made of homemade flour tortillas stuffed with eggs, potatoes and sausage or bacon topped with local chiles. They come in both red or green; or ask for "Christmas," and you'll get both.

Head to the plaza, the heart of this easily walkable city. There you'll find dozens of Native American artisans selling their handmade silver and turquoise jewelry, pottery and crafts along the Palace of the Governors, an adobe structure in the city's historic district.

Learn all about Santa Fe through one of the many walking tours offered, including those focusing on chocolate, beer, coffee

and architecture. Or just meander down the picturesque side streets and hidden alleyways where you'll find enough treasures to take home to friends and family.

Step into the past on East de Vargas Street at what is billed as the oldest house in the U.S. (circa 1646) next to the oldest church (circa 1610-1626) filled with artifacts and layers of history. Right off the plaza is the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts and New Mexico Museum of Art. Then it's on to the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, a jewel box of her work from childhood through her years as a local resident. Want more? Rent a car and drive into the desert to see the vistas that inspired O'Keeffe—and artists today—and the nearby Abiquiú and Ghost Ranch where she lived and worked for decades.

Don't miss Museum Hill, just a few minutes from the center of town and easily accessible by the free Santa Fe Pick-Up shuttle bus. There you'll find four museums displaying American Indian arts and culture and international folk art, plus the Santa Fe Botanical Garden.

With more than 400 restaurants representing every type of fare, Santa Fe is a foodie's paradise. Try the authentic Mexican cuisine at Sazón, where Chef Fernando Olea uses indigenous culinary traditions to delight the palate. Choose the day's fresh fish with one of Olea's signature mole sauces made with 30 ingredients including toasted and ground spices, seeds, nuts, chile peppers and chocolate. For the brave, there's Oxaquenos—baby grasshoppers on crispy corn tortillas.

Hit the Santa Fe Margarita Trail where you can sample dozens of margaritas specially crafted in each featured location. Then satisfy your sweet tooth at one of the many chocolate shops. Kakawa Chocolate House, with

two locations, offers dozens of hot drinking elixirs based on traditional Mayan and Aztec recipes—many using, you guessed it, chiles. Pair a cup with a mouth-watering prickly pear or goat cheese and sage truffle.

Not to be missed is the year-round Farmers Market held Saturdays in the revitalized Railyard District. Watch farmers roast peppers, and sample local honey, apple cider and bison jerky. Or indulge yourself with a lavender blue-corn donut.

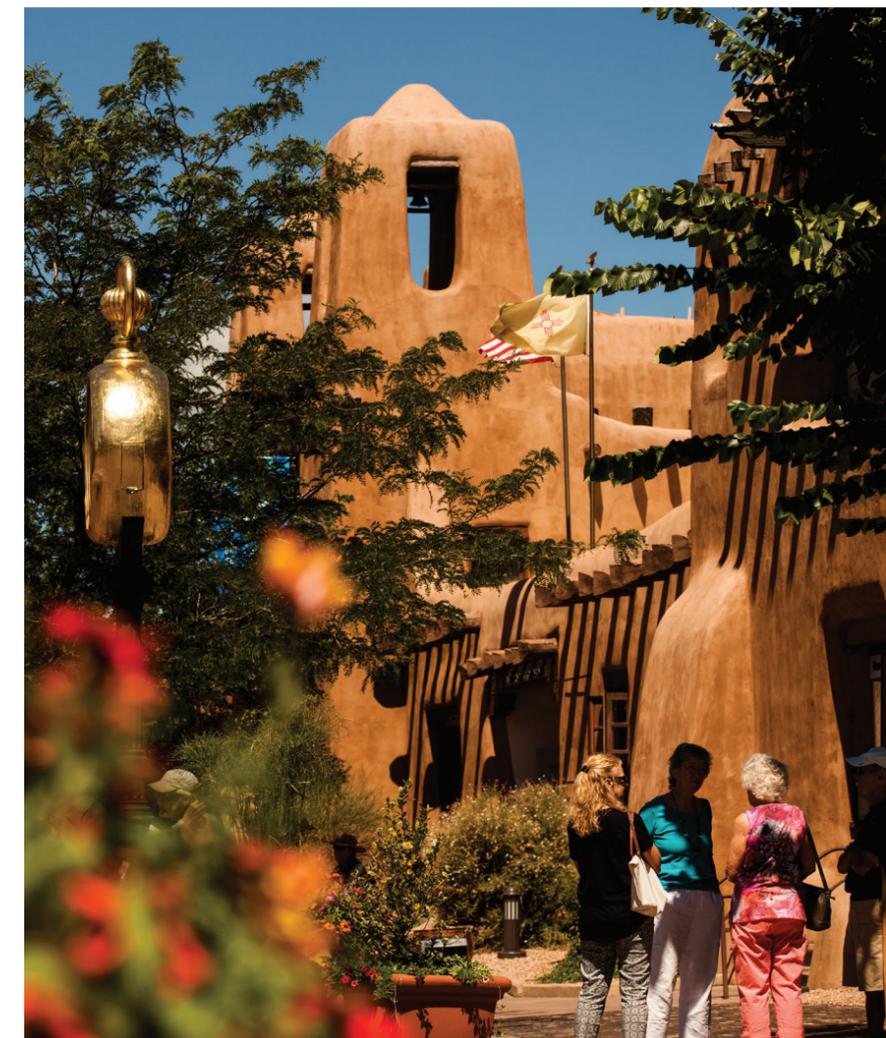
Get your spoons ready for Souper Bowl XXV on February 2, when local chefs compete for best soup, and Santa Fe Restaurant Week, February 15-24, with bargain prix-fixe lunches and dinners at some of the city's top restaurants.

Art is everywhere. Spend a day strolling along Canyon Road perusing more than 100 art galleries and studios, many with outdoor sculpture gardens. Or come Christmas Eve for the Farolito Walk, one of the city's most beloved holiday traditions, when the mile-long road is ablaze with luminarias.

If you want to explore local Native American culture, there are a half dozen Pueblo tribes (each a sovereign nation) living within an hour of Santa Fe. The public is invited to their annual change of leadership ceremonies and feast day celebrations in December and January.

Santa Fe is also a playground for outdoor recreation. Ski Santa Fe is just 16 miles from the plaza, and there's world-class skiing at Taos Ski Valley about two hours away.

After all this activity, what better way to end a busy day than with a sunset. Santa Fe boasts some of the country's best as Mother Nature puts on a dazzling nightly show that fills the sky with ribbons of vermilion, mauve and crimson, casting its colors on the desert landscape. It's enough to make you come back for more. ☑



CHILES, PALACE OF THE GOVERNORS: BETHANY KANDEL; ALL OTHERS: TOURISM SANTA FE

PLANNING YOUR TRIP

Frontier Airlines flies direct from Orlando to Albuquerque, and Santa Fe is just an hour's drive north of the city. For planning, check out santafe.org

GET CREATIVE

Santa Fe has dozens of crafty and educational classes: Baca Street Pottery (ceramics); Santa Fe School of Cooking (lessons in Southwestern cuisine) and Liquid Light Glass (glass blowing). bacastreetpottery.com, santafeschoolofcooking.com, liquidlightglass.com

SPA TIME

Ten Thousand Waves is a spa sanctuary inspired by Japanese mountain hot spring resorts. You'll enjoy numerous outdoor hot tubs, cold pools, foot soaks and saunas before your shiatsu massage, oxygen facial or herbal wrap. tenthouousandwaves.com

MEOW WOLF

Narnia meets Oz in this unusual, immersive, multimedia art experience. Explore a huge indoor funhouse, climb a treehouse, play musical dinosaur bones and step into a refrigerator to enter secret rooms and portals to a magical world beyond. meowwolf.com

LA FONDA ON THE PLAZA

Stay in this landmark historic hotel in the center of town for a taste of Santa Fe's past. Docents offer free art and history tours. Be sure to take time for cocktails at the rooftop Bell Tower Bar and enjoy the incredible sunset view. lafondasantafe.com

(Clockwise from top left) Holiday lights and farolitos decorate homes and buildings along Canyon Road; local Native American Pueblos welcome visitors for traditional dance celebrations; the New Mexico Museum of Art features Southwestern artists in a Pueblo revival building; skiers are rewarded with amazing mountain views from Ski Santa Fe; colorful painted pillars decorate the outside of the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts; chile peppers come in many varieties at the Farmer's Market; handmade jewelry by local artisans is for sale along the plaza.

